Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
for
(DOI-BLM-CA-N070-2010-0002-EA)
Sand Spring and Lone Spring Resource
Protection and Enhancement Project

INTRODUCTION:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis (DOI-BLM-CA-N070-2010-0002-EA) analyzing the impacts of constructing exclosure fences, redeveloping springs, and relocating watering troughs at Sand Spring and Lone Spring.

The EA analyzes two (2) alternatives from which I have selected Alternative 1 (Proposed Action).

1. Alternative 1, the Proposed Action is described on page 2 of the EA and consists of:

Construction of approximately 14,000 feet (2.65 miles) of barbed wire fence (built to BLM standards); removal of approximately 4,150 feet (.79 miles) of existing fence; installation of 2,935 feet (.56 miles) of pipeline; relocation of 3 water troughs at each site; closure of approximately 0.88 miles of existing roads and creation of approximately 1.6 miles of new road; and removal of a small wire pen at Lone Spring.

PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY:

The proposed action addresses the underlying need for the proposal and accomplishes the following objectives developed from the Surprise Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision (ROD), April 2008, and Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs).

The RMP supports the proposed project construction as identified in the following sections:

Section 2.14.4 (p.2-59):

- Actions would minimize damage to the watershed and its soil, vegetation, air-quality or other resources of the public lands.

Section 2.19.5 (p.2-77)

- Protecting uplands, springs, streams, riparian areas, and wetlands from grazing by employing and maintaining protective exclosures.

Section 2.22.2 (p. 2-87)

- Locate new livestock watering sites where depletion of natural springs and wetland areas can be avoided. Equip watering troughs with ramps for wildlife access and egress; provide water at ground level, if possible.
- Ensure that sufficient vegetation is retained around springs and other water sources, riparian areas, and wetlands to fulfill the needs of wildlife.
- Remove fencing that is no longer required and replace fencing that is harmful to wildlife. Build all new fencing to wildlife-friendly specifications.

- Close and rehabilitate (when feasible) resource extraction or other temporary roads where needed to reduce disturbance of special status and special interest wildlife.

Section 2.2.2 (p. 2-6)

- Actions would provide protection and aid in the preservation of significant cultural resources; ensuring that these resources are available to present and future generations for appropriate uses.

RMP Objectives

Objective 1: The BLM Surprise Field Office would seek to reduce imminent threats to cultural resources and resolve potential conflicts, from natural or human-caused deterioration or from other resource uses…(RMP Sec.2.2.3,p.2-6).

Objective 2: Achieve healthy and productive wetland and riparian habitats through measures that will restore and protect riparian vegetation, and achieve habitat diversity and hydrologic stability (RMP Sec. 2.15.3, p.2-63).

Objective 3: Development of springs, seeps, and other water related projects shall be designed to promote rangeland health. Wherever possible, water sources shall be available for yearlong use by wildlife (S&Gs Guideline 13).

ROD Management Actions

Maintain 5,500 acres of existing livestock exclosures. Meadows and aspen stands of significant value to wildlife will receive priority for additional livestock exclusion. When fencing natural water sources, water would be provided outside fences for livestock, wildlife, and wild horses.

The needs of wildlife and wild horses would be considered in water developments for livestock grazing. Water would be retained and provided at ground level in all livestock water developments. Natural riparian habitat, and a substantial portion of the surrounding cover, would be protected for wildlife use where water is developed from natural sources.

Apply restoration treatments to improve hydrologic function and water quality, including bioengineering treatments, improved livestock grazing planting woody riparian vegetation, and installing in-stream structures.

Maintain existing water sources and manage to promote wildlife habitat, improve distribution of livestock and wild horses, and provide for recreational uses.

Prioritize development of new water sources to extend seasonal water availability for wildlife and to benefit desired ecosystems.

Implement the *Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan for Nevada and Eastern California*, First Edition (2004), including the Vya and Massacre Conservation Strategies.

Design and locate new livestock water developments to avoid dewatering natural springs or wetland areas. Outfit all livestock troughs with wildlife access ramps. Strive to provide water at ground level for wildlife at all developments, as feasible.

The action is also in accordance with 43 CFR 4100 and is consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act, and Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT DETERMINATION:

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that Alternative 1, the proposed action is not a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. For this reason no environmental impact statement needs to be prepared. This finding is based on the following rationale and discussion of context and intensity of the action.

Rationale:

Following is the rationale for why the identified issues discussed in the EA will not be significantly affected or affect the action.

Cultural Resources In 2008 the Surprise Field Office (SFO) conducted National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 compliance inventories for the Long Valley Grazing Allotment. The inventories are designed to identify any cultural resources that may be affected by impacts associated with grazing. As a result of the inventories the SFO identified two cultural resource sites that were being impacted by grazing on the Long Valley Grazing Allotment. These two sites are associated with Sand Spring and Lone Spring. Neither of these cultural resource sites has been formally evaluated for eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). However, the BLM Surprise Field Office assumes that both of these sites are eligible to the NRHP.

Disturbance to the cultural resources at Sand Spring are a result of the watering troughs being located within the cultural resource site. This has resulted in heavy use by cattle which are impacting the area by trampling, trailing, wallowing, and soil churning. This has affected cultural resources by causing artifact breakage, horizontal artifact displacement, and erosion to sub-surface deposits from denuded vegetation and severe soil erosion. In addition to cattle impacts, a two track road runs through the center of the site causing the same effects to cultural resources as discussed above.

At Lone Spring cattle impacts to cultural resources are also a result of the watering troughs being located within the cultural resource site. In addition, wild horses frequent the watering troughs and associated riparian areas year-round. Soil within this area is less fragile than soil at Sand Spring; therefore affects to sub-surface deposits are not an issue. However, heavy use of the area by cattle and wild horses is resulting in trailing and trampling, which is causing horizontal artifact displacement, and artifact breakage within the site.

Sage-grouse Habitat The proposed action is relatively small in scale. It would provide negligible benefits to sage-grouse and other wildlife by the creation and maintenance of riparian habitat at Lone Springs and creation of the new exclosure at Sand Spring which will increase local opportunities for nesting, feeding and cover. Mitigations for sage-grouse include adding fence markers as necessary to reduce potential fence collisions.

Pygmy Rabbit Habitat Pygmy rabbit are not known to occur in the general area of either project. Surveys at Sand Spring did not detect pygmy rabbit or signs of their use. Habitat at Lone Spring does not appear suitable for pygmy rabbit and no rabbits or burrows were observed during survey and design of the project.

Wild Horses
Neither of the project sites is located within a Herd Management Area (HMA) or Herd Area; however, approximately 30 wild horses occupy the Mountain Pasture in the Long Valley Allotment. These horses likely entered the allotment from the nearby High Rock HMA. Wild horses water at Lone Spring, possibly year-round. There is no recent evidence of wild horses using Sand Spring in the Massacre Lakes or Long Valley Allotment.
The proposed action would not affect the wild horse population because water will remain available year-round at Lone Spring. The riparian exclosure at Lone Spring would be constructed in the Lone Spring Seeding and therefore, would not affect wild horses since they generally do not enter this pasture.

Livestock Management
Implementation of the proposed action would not change current permitted active use (AUMs), kind, and authorized season of use. The project is scheduled for implemented in 2010, but could be postponed for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to funding or other higher priority projects. All work would be conducted by BLM staff or contractors, and built to specifications as identified in the EA. Future project maintenance would be the responsibility of the permittee.

Vegetation
While livestock will continue to graze affected pastures annually, the proposed action is unlikely to change utilization patterns or affect basic plant communities and plant community seral stages within the pastures affected by the project area. Some vegetation would be crushed along the entire length of the fence, pipeline, and troughs as a result of vehicle traffic during construction of the project. The disturbed area would naturally revegetate in two or three growing seasons because blading of the project area will only be allowed on the new access roads. Occasional (usually once per year) use of the two-track trail for fence maintenance would leave evidence of passage, but would not eliminate vegetation from the trail. Vegetation will also be crushed from animal concentrations at the water troughs.
The proposed action would not contribute to cumulative effects to vegetation as a resource because effects would be limited to the project area, and would not result in any measurable change in arrangement or distribution of vegetation communities on an allotment or regionally basis.

Resource(s)/Concerns discussed but Eliminated as an Issue
One resource and/or potential concern was identified during internal and external scoping. This is listed and discussed in Chapter 2 of the EA, starting on p. 4. I have reviewed the rational provided for each resource or concern and support their elimination as an issue.

Context: The proposed action is in a project area involving two grazing allotments and four specific pastures totaling approximately 30,936 acres of BLM administered land that by itself

does not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance, but on a local level it is important to the local economy and public land health.

Intensity: The following discussion is based on the relevant factors that should be considered in evaluating intensity as described in 43 CFR 4100:

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

I have determined that none of the direct, indirect or cumulative impacts associated with the selected alternative are significant, individually or combined.

2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.

The proposed action is located within a rural setting. Construction of fences and development of springs including underground pipelines have occurred in the affected area for decades, and there have been no known instances where public health or safety has been affected or a conflict has occurred.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

A discussion of these unique geographic areas and anticipated environmental issues is located in Chapter 3of the EA, starting on pg. 4. Based on the EA I have determined that the selected alternative will not have a significant impact on the unique characteristics within affected area.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Scoping for the proposed action and background information was sent to known affected and interested publics. There were no comments received opposing the project and comments concerning the design were considered in the EA; therefore I have determined that the effects described in the EA are not highly controversial.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Fence construction and spring development is an activity common to BLM management, and BLM has developed standards to minimize wildlife risks. The analysis provided in the EA does not indicate that this action would involve any unique or unknown risks.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The construction of a fence and pipeline is not precedent setting.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts – which include connected actions regardless of land ownership.

A cumulative effects analysis was conducted as part of the EA, and it determined that there were no cumulative effects associated with the selected alternative.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The action does not adversely affect properties listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973.

There are no known threatened or endangered species or their habitats in or around the project area.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of a federal, state, local, or tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment, where nonfederal requirements are consistent with federal requirements.

The action does not violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

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Shane DeForest, Surprise Field Manager Date